



Monitoring and Evaluation Policy

First developed Adopted by the Board of Aidlink - **July 2014**
(Developed by Mike Williams, consultant)

Reviewed & Updated - **November 2020**

Table of Contents

- List of Acronymsiii
- 1. Context, Purpose and Scope of this Policy 4
- 2. Definitions of Monitoring and Evaluation 4
- 3. Purpose of Monitoring and Evaluation 5
 - 3.1 Accountability..... 5
 - 3.2 Learning..... 5
 - 3.3 Balancing Accountability and Learning 6
- 4. Adherence to International Standards and Best Practice 6
 - 4.1 DAC Criteria 6
 - 4.1.1 Contribution and Attribution..... 6
 - 4.2 The International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness 7
 - 4.3 Evaluation Tools and Methodologies 7
 - 4.3.1 Rainbow Framework Planning Tool..... 7
- 5. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 8
 - 5.1 Theory of Change 8
 - 5.2 Results Based Management System 8
 - 5.3 Three-Level Monitoring and Evaluation System 9
- 6. Monitoring and Evaluation by Partners (Level 1)..... 9
 - 6.1 Targeting..... 9
 - 6.2 Baselines..... 9
 - 6.3 Monitoring by Partners 10
 - 6.4 Role of Partners in Evaluation 10
 - 6.5 Partner Capacity-Building for M&E 10
- 7. Monitoring and Evaluation of Aidlink's Programme (Level 2)..... 10
 - 7.1 Monitoring & Evaluation of the Overseas Development Programme 10
 - 7.1.1 Field Monitoring Visits..... 11
 - 7.1.2 Final Evaluations..... 11
 - 7.1.3 Mid-Term Evaluations (MTE)..... 11
 - 7.2 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Partner Capacity-Building Programme 11
 - 7.3 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Student Immersion Programme 11
 - 7.4 Linking with Audit and Financial Management Review Processes..... 12
- 8. Monitoring and Evaluation at Organisational Level (Level 3) 12
 - 8.1 Annual Field Review of Partner CB and Programme Work 12
 - 8.2 Annual Internal Review of Programming Work 12
 - 8.3 Long-term (longitudinal) Programme Reviews 13
- 9. Oversight and Resourcing of Monitoring and Evaluation Work..... 13
 - 9.1 Responsibility for M&E..... 13
 - 9.2 Staffing Capacity..... 13
 - 9.3 Budgeting for M&E..... 13

10. Updating and Review of the Monitoring and Evaluation Policy 14

Annex 3 Covid-19 Update to Aidlink’s Monitoring and Evaluation Framework..... 14

Annex 2: Figure 1 - Aidlink’s Three-Level Monitoring & Evaluation System 15

Annex 3: Covid-19 Update to Aidlink’s Three-Level Monitoring and Evaluation System
(November 2020) 16

List of Acronyms

- CB: Capacity-Building
- CSF: Civil Society Funding (Irish Aid grant)
- CSO: Civil Society Organisation
- DAC: Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
- M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation
- MTE: Mid Term Evaluation
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- OSA: Organisational Self-Assessment
- PCM: Project Cycle Management
- RBM: Results Based Management
- RF: Results Framework
- SIP: Student Immersion Programme
- SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound
- ToC: Theory of Change
- ToR: Terms of Reference

1. Context, Purpose and Scope of this Policy

This Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy paper outlines the parameters and approach of Aidlink's programme monitoring and evaluation activities as key, learning focused, components of the broader organisational Project Cycle Management (PCM) system.¹ This policy covers all programming interventions, including individual development projects and programmes² implemented by partner agencies at field level; Aidlink's Student Immersion Programme (SIP); its specific capacity-building (CB) approach with partners; and its overall programme of work at global level. As Aidlink takes a rights-based approach to its work, enabling and empowering communities to deliver sustainable change, the M&E approach covers both Aidlink's rights/advocacy work and implementation work on the ground.

The policy is guided by and implemented in coherence with the following key organisational principals and policies including

- The Aidlink Strategic Plan (2017-2021)³ - as the ultimate guiding document for all organisational interventions;
- The organisational Theory of Change (as defined in the Strategic Plan);
- Aidlink's Partnership Approach to Development (2016);
- Aidlink's Partner Capacity-Building Approach and Plan (2017);
- Irish Aid Civil Society Funding Annual Monitoring & Reporting Guidelines 2018;
- Irish Aid Policy for International Development – A Better World⁴.

Aidlink has developed a **Results Based Management (RBM) system** to monitor and assess the performance of its programmes. The monitoring and evaluation processes are an integral part of the RBM system, and are the key mechanisms through which the tracking, assessment and analysis of results is recorded.

In 2018 Aidlink funding relationship with Irish Aid changed; from the Programme Grant funding stream to the Civil Society funding (CSF) stream. As a result, Aidlink prioritised Girls Education and Empowerment targeting one partner, The Girl Child Network, in one country, Kenya, for this Irish Aid co-funded element of Aidlink's work. Reporting to Irish Aid is guided by Irish Aid Civil Society Funding Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines (2018).

The onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 and resultant travel restrictions, both internationally and within programme countries, has impacted on the ability to carry out M&E activities as normal, particularly level 2, Aidlink monitoring on programmes and six monthly monitoring visits.

Aidlink have adapted their M&E approach and plans for the period of the pandemic, a detailed note on this can be found in Annex 1.

2. Definitions of Monitoring and Evaluation

For the purpose of this policy, monitoring is defined as **'the continuous and systematic assessment of the implementation and performance of a project or programme over the course of its implementation cycle'**. The process involves ongoing collection, review and analysis of information to measure progress against programme plans and objectives and identify key learnings. The monitoring process usually includes a number of specific monitoring interventions at prescribed intervals (e.g. six-monthly field monitoring visits or quarterly monitoring reports).

Similarly, an evaluation is defined as **'A rigorous and in-depth assessment of the progress of all aspects of a project or programme against its initial plan and objectives at a key point during its life cycle'**. Evaluations are typically undertaken at or near the mid-point of the project (a mid-term evaluation) and at the end of the project cycle (a final evaluation) and may be undertaken as internal or external exercises.

¹ The PCM system includes stages of project design / development, approval, funding, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The evaluation at the end of the cycle is intended to inform the design and development of a new phase of programming.

² For the purpose of this policy, a programme is defined as a coherent and integrated set of individual projects that may be implemented by one or more agencies in order to achieve significant and sustainable benefits for a defined target group, community or population.

³ Reviewed 2019 and most recently 2020 in context of COVID-19 global pandemic.

⁴ Policy can be found here: <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/aboutus/abetterworldirelandspolicyforinternationaldevelopment/A-Better-World-Irelands-Policy-for-International-Development.pdf>

3. Purpose of Monitoring and Evaluation

M&E is an essential element of Aidlink's PCM, playing a major role in the credibility of the organisation and its projects. The purpose of M&E activities within the organisation is two-fold:

- To ensure that Aidlink is fully **accountable** for the delivery of all of its programme and project activities;
- To ensure that Aidlink and its partners **learn lessons** from the implementation of projects or programmes and utilise that learning in seeking to improve or enhance the implementation of programmes on an ongoing basis.

3.1 Accountability

Aidlink sees its accountability as having four dimensions:

1. **Primary ('downward') accountability** is to the intended beneficiaries⁵ of Aidlink projects i.e. to the poor marginalised and / or vulnerable people in the developing countries where Aidlink works. Downward accountability also includes transparency and openness in dealing with Aidlink's partner agencies that directly implement the projects for these beneficiaries.
2. **Internal accountability:** Within the organisation itself, the management and board of Aidlink need to assure themselves that the organisation is delivering to the best of its ability on its planned programming objectives and activities, in line with the organisational strategic plan.
3. **Donor accountability:** Aidlink is obliged to meet the commitments it makes to its donors and supporters. This includes the provision of adequate and timely information in relation to the use of funds raised from the general public.⁶ It also includes delivery on specific commitments made to institutional donors that fund particular programmes or aspects of Aidlink's work.
4. **Accountability to other stakeholders** to which Aidlink is accountable may include government agencies in Ireland and/or in programme countries; other local agencies or institutions that are not directly involved in the projects;⁷ and other (non-donor, non-partner) agencies that Aidlink may be collaborating with in the implementation of programmes.⁸

All Aidlink programmes and their related M&E processes are designed to address all of these dimensions of accountability.

3.2 Learning

Aidlink's approach to monitoring and evaluation includes a specific focus on learning, and applying the lessons from its experience in relation to the following areas:

- The **design** of the project or programme, with particular reference to its relevance, appropriateness and cost-effectiveness;
- The **delivery** of the programme or project, with specific reference to activities, outcomes, (both expected and actual), objectives and outcomes;
- The local environment and **context** in which projects or programmes are operating;
- The programming **approaches** or methodologies being used (e.g. advocacy, service provision, research) to deliver programmes;
- The **capacity** of Aidlink and its partners to deliver the programmes, and
- The **relationships** with various parties involved - including both partners and external stakeholders.

A key aspect of the learning process is that lessons are **formally and systematically documented** during monitoring visits and evaluation processes, and that this documentation is utilised to adapt or modify existing approaches and programmes, and in the development of new programmes or approaches. Aidlink recognises the benefits of using learning to implement adaptive management decisions. Aidlink will develop an adaptive management policy, in line with BetterEvaluation guidelines⁹, to strengthen the use of our learning.

⁵ Beneficiaries is defined as, "the individuals, groups or organisations, whether targeted or not that benefit directly or indirectly from the development intervention"

⁶ Including (but not exclusive to) its obligations under the Irish Charities Act (2009).

⁷ For example, some other some local communities that may not be directly targeted by projects but may be affected by them.

⁸ For example, other International NGOs or UN agencies or research institutions that collaborate with Aidlink in the delivery of programmes or have a specific interest in these programmes.

⁹ https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/MandE_for_adaptive_management_WP1_Overview_202009.pdf

3.3 Balancing Accountability and Learning

Within the development sector, monitoring or evaluation processes can sometimes place a heavy emphasis on either the accountability or the learning dimension, while downgrading or even excluding the other dimension entirely. As outlined above, both accountability and learning are integral dimensions of Aidlink's approach to monitoring and evaluation. Aidlink is committed to ensuring that, in undertaking monitoring exercises and designing evaluation processes, a balanced approach is applied, so that both of these dimensions are fully considered and explored, and that reports fully reflect both the accountability and learning objectives.

4. Adherence to International Standards and Best Practice

Aidlink's overall approach to monitoring and evaluation is guided by a number of key international standards and best practice approaches:

4.1 DAC Criteria¹⁰

Aidlink Monitoring and evaluation plans are guided by the '*DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance*' as widely used within the development sector (2019): www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf. Terms of Reference are developed for each monitoring visits and evaluation exercise and make specific reference to six focused research questions:

1. **Relevance:** Is the intervention doing the right things?
 - ✓ The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries, global, country and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities and continue to do so if circumstances change.
2. **Coherence:** How well does the intervention fit?
 - ✓ The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution
3. **Effectiveness:** Is the intervention achieving its objective?
 - ✓ The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.
4. **Efficiency:** How well are resources being used?
 - ✓ The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.
5. **Impact:** What difference does the intervention make?
 - ✓ The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher level effects.
6. **Sustainability:** Will the benefits last?
 - ✓ The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.

4.1.1 Contribution and Attribution

In assessing progress against the DAC criteria, the degree to which progress (or lack of it) can be specifically attributed to the interventions of Aidlink and its partners may not be always clear, particularly where the interventions of a range of actors may be influencing the change processes in a particular area, or for a particular target group. Notwithstanding the complexities involved, **Aidlink evaluation processes attempt to look at both contribution and attribution aspects** of progress, as follows:

- The degree to which some or all of the changes (good or bad) may be **directly attributed** to Aidlink's interventions, and / or
- The degree to which Aidlink's actions **may have contributed** towards some or all of the changes, even if not wholly responsible for them.

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

4.2 The International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness

Given that effectiveness is one of the DAC Criteria that Aidlink utilises to assess its work, the ongoing evolution of the international development effectiveness agenda¹¹ is of particular relevance to all of Aidlink's work, and to its monitoring and evaluation approach in particular. The Istanbul Principles¹² for CSO Development Effectiveness form a key reference point for the evaluation of its development work:

1. Respect and promote human rights and justice
2. Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women and girls' rights.
3. Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation.
4. Promote environmental sustainability.
5. Practice transparency and accountability.
6. Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity.
7. Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning.
8. Commit to realising positive sustainable change.

Many of these principles are already encapsulated in key Aidlink documents such as the *Strategic Plan*, the *Partnership Approach to Development*, and the *Organisational Approach to Partner Capacity-Building*. The principles are specifically referred to in developing Terms of Reference (ToRs) and plans for evaluations, and in evaluation reports. The *International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness*¹³, which incorporates the Istanbul Principles and provides guidance on how to achieve them, also provides a broader reference point for Aidlink's evaluation work.

4.3 Evaluation Tools and Methodologies

In addition to utilising the DAC criteria and being formally guided by the CSO Development Effectiveness Framework, the organisation also keeps abreast of the latest international developments in relation to monitoring and evaluation methodologies and tools. Aidlink does not prescribe one particular methodology to be used for all of its evaluations. Rather (and usually in consultation with the consultant or agency conducting the evaluation on its behalf), it seeks to **identify a process and methodology that is appropriate to each individual evaluation situation and context.**

Considerations in choosing an appropriate methodology include;

- The stage of the programme within the project cycle - is it midterm or end of project?
- The key research questions – what do we want to find out about?
- Time and resources available
- Quantitative, qualitative or a mix method – are either best suited or would a mixture of both be best?¹⁴

4.3.1 Rainbow Framework Planning Tool

Given the wide array of evaluation methodologies and processes that currently exist, Aidlink will seek to use the **Rainbow Framework Planning Tool**¹⁵ produced by BetterEvaluation¹⁶ as a guide in designing and managing its evaluation processes according to the following stages outlined under that tool:

1. Managing the evaluation
2. Defining what is to be evaluated
3. Framing the boundaries of an evaluation
4. Describing activities, outcomes, impacts and context
5. Understanding causes of outcomes and impact
6. Synthesising data from one or more evaluations
7. Reporting and supporting the use of findings.

¹¹ As initially articulated under the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and further elaborated at subsequent international High Level Fora resulting in the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (2011).

¹² As initially agreed at the First Global Assembly of the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness in Istanbul 2009 and subsequently endorsed at the Second Global assembly in Siam Reap in 2011

¹³ Known as the 'Siam Reap Consensus' and agreed at the Second Global Assembly of the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness in Siam Reap, Cambodia (2011).

¹⁴ <https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Data-collection.pdf>

¹⁵ https://www.betterevaluation.org/rainbow_framework

¹⁶ BetterEvaluation (betterevaluation.org) is an international collaboration by a number of leading development agencies and donors to improve evaluation theory and practice by sharing and discussing evaluations and approaches. The Rainbow Framework Planning Tool was revised and updated in February 2014.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Aidlink's organisational Theory of Change and its Results Based Management (RBM) system provide the overarching framework for its monitoring and evaluation processes. The monitoring and evaluation system operates at three levels: partners, programmes and organisational.

5.1 Theory of Change

Aidlink's Theory of Change (ToC)¹⁷ provides the initial reference point in seeking to determine the degree to which its programmes and projects are delivering on the expectations of its intended beneficiaries, of the organisation itself, and of its donors and partners.

The current Theory of Change expresses the ultimate aim of ensuring that 'People (especially women and girls) living in the poorest communities in Africa will be able to achieve healthy and fulfilling lives'. Individual projects and programmes are based on more specific change theories, as expressed through their specific programming activities, outcomes, objectives and outputs (see Section 5.2 below). By partnering directly with local partners to educate, enable and empower them to deliver sustainable change, Aidlink aims to achieve wider development on both this collective and an individual basis. All evaluation processes seek to establish the degree to which these aims are being achieved within the relevant project or programme.

5.2 Results Based Management System

The organisational results based management (RBM) system provides the basis for all monitoring and evaluation activities. Irish Aid uses this system alongside using the OECD DAC framework (outlined in section 4.1) to obtain a well-rounded view of programme impact. Within the RBM system, progress is measured at three levels: in relation to project outcomes, objectives and outputs.

Project Outcomes are defined as the further results that will accrue (particularly for the target community) as a result of the basic outputs being achieved, and subject to further assumptions and risks being allowed for at outcome level e.g. the availability of the borehole will result in a good clean water supply being available to the target community (subject to certain other assumptions).

The **Project Objectives**, as defined in advance, will be achieved if the combination of project outcomes is achieved, and subject to further assumptions and risks at this level (e.g. the availability of a good clean water supply should result in a reduction of waterborne diseases in the target population). The **impact** of the project, as defined under the project objectives will be articulated clearly in terms of **clear and sustainable benefits for target beneficiary groups**.

Project Outputs are defined as the direct result of the basic project activities that are to be implemented. While some **risks and assumptions** have to be allowed for in the project design, and are identified in advance, the successful delivery of the stated activities should lead to the achievement of the outputs (e.g. the construction of a water borehole or well will result in the output of the wellbeing in place).

A set of **indicators** is established for the measurement of progress at output, outcome and objective levels. Indicators may be both quantitative and qualitative in nature, a mixture of both types is often used. In order to make meaningful assessments of progress, and to facilitate rigorous and accurate evaluation processes, all indicators are required to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound). These indicators are agreed with Aidlink, the partner and the donor at project design stage. Assessment tools to measure each indicator are adopted or adapted from existing best practice tools within the sector. Should a specific tool need to be developed, this will be done building on learnings from the sector¹⁸.

The establishment of formal **baselines** at the beginning of every project is mandatory. Baselines are developed in relation to each area of activity so that progress can be measured accurately later on. Key targets are set at output and outcome levels, with specific reference to the baselines, and to be achieved at specific time intervals within the project cycle. Timeframes for the achievement of targets may vary, so that all indicators do not necessarily have an

¹⁷ Aidlink's Summary Theory of Change, Aidlink Strategic Plan, Page 12. For review in 2021.

¹⁸ An assessment tool library is under development to be annexed to this policy doc by end of 2021.

annual target for each year. However, care is required in setting targets overall, in order to ensure that sufficient data is being assimilated for the production of meaningful annual reports, and for undertaking rigorous interim and final evaluations.

The **means of verification** for each indicator and target is also expected to be clearly elaborated at the design stage, so that progress can be accurately measured during M&E processes.

Specific consideration is given at the design stage to the development of indicators and targets in relation to **rights based or advocacy work**, which may, in some cases, require more qualitative indicators (e.g. in relation to community awareness levels or attitudinal change) than might be the case for direct service provision activities (e.g. water supply or healthcare services).

Note: The RBM is a living document, targets are assessed, and indicators will be reviewed and altered to ensure accurate and relevant data is captured.

5.3 Three-Level Monitoring and Evaluation System

The Aidlink Monitoring and Evaluation System operates on three levels:

Level 1: Monitoring and Evaluation of projects and programmes by **Partner Organisations**.

Level 2: Monitoring and Evaluation of the **Aidlink Overseas Programme**, including:

- The development programmes (as comprised of individual partner projects);
- The Partner Capacity-Building Programme; and
- The Student Immersion Programme.

Level 3: Monitoring and Evaluation at **Organisational Level** - including the oversight role of the Aidlink Board.

The policies and processes relating to M&E at each of these levels are outlined in Sections 6 - 8, below. The three-level monitoring and evaluation system is illustrated in Figure 1 (Appendix 1).

6. Monitoring and Evaluation by Partners (Level 1)

As a partnership based agency, all of Aidlink's field programmes are implemented by local partner agencies in Africa. Hence, the partner organisations have the initial responsibility for monitoring and evaluation at field level as part of their own project cycle management systems. Partner programmes generally operate to a **three year cycle** but may have shorter or longer cycles in some cases.

6.1 Targeting

The identification of the target beneficiary group for each project is a basic requirement at the initial stage of project design and is an essential step in facilitating the development of a results framework. The target population is clearly defined both in terms of numbers and categories of people. A clear distinction is made also between the intended **direct beneficiaries** of projects, and other **indirect beneficiaries**. Specific baselines and targets for each category of beneficiaries are included in the results framework, with a particular emphasis on particularly marginalised or vulnerable groups that may have been identified in advance, this includes disaggregation by gender where possible. The process for identification and targeting of beneficiaries is guided by Aidlink's Targeting Policy (2014) and the targeting policy of the implementing partner.

6.2 Baselines

All partners are required to develop a results framework for each project at the beginning of the project cycle. Ideally, the baseline study should be conducted before the project begins, but in practice it may not be always feasible to do so. **A maximum period of three months from the project start date is allowed at the beginning of a project for the completion of the baseline study and establishment of all target outputs and outcomes for the full project cycle.** Partners are encouraged to utilise external expertise in the establishment of targets and baselines where necessary, with financial support for this being included in the project budget. Local communities and other local development agencies are expected to be consulted and / or directly engaged in the identification of priority beneficiaries.

6.3 Monitoring by Partners

Partner organisations are expected to visit each project area on a quarterly basis at a minimum and to provide monitoring reports (in a standard format) to Aidlink on a quarterly basis. The project results framework is utilised as a guide for checking progress against each activity area (but recognising that there are unlikely to be specific quarterly targets in many areas of the RF). Partners are expected to include beneficiaries in the project monitoring activities and discussions. Apart from reporting on activities, outputs and outcomes (where possible), partner monitoring reports will also include reference to specific accountability and learning issues, as referred to in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 above. Project funding is released by Aidlink in tranches¹⁹ on receipt of satisfactory reports from partners.

COVID-19 has forced Aidlink and its partners to adapt to new circumstances. Routine M&E procedures have been adapted to comply with COVID-19 restrictions & the responsive approach can be found in Annex 2.

6.4 Role of Partners in Evaluation

Mid-term and final evaluations will normally be conducted in the context of each programme. Terms of Reference for the evaluation are drawn up by Aidlink and agreed with Partners. Partners play a key role in facilitating the evaluation itself and ensuring full and objective participation of beneficiaries in the evaluation process.

Aidlink's flagship programme, the Kenya Inclusive Quality Education Project (KIQEP) is co funded by Irish Aid and is delivered in partnership with The Girl Child Network, Kenya. Aidlink also works with other partner organisations within its development programme. The details of partner responsibilities within the M&E process are outlined in Section 7, below.

6.5 Partner Capacity-Building for M&E

Under the Partner Capacity Building Approach, Aidlink provides specific support to partners in relation to the development of their overall Project Cycle Management (PCM) capacity, including their ability to monitor and evaluate programming work. As for other aspects of capacity support, the specific PCM support to be provided to a partner is based on organisational needs and priorities, as identified under the Organisational Self-Assessment (OSA) process described in the CB approach document.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation of Aidlink's Programme (Level 2)

Aidlink's overseas programme has three components:

- The Development Programmes
- The Partner Capacity Building Programme;
- The Student Immersion Programme.

The M&E approach relating to each of these three components is described in Sections 7.1 to 7.3, below:

7.1 Monitoring & Evaluation of the Overseas Development Programme

Aidlink has developed a composite results framework (RF) for all of its programme work in a similar manner and format as for the individual project results frameworks developed by partners. This framework is used for internal accountability and learning purposes (as described above in Section 3) and specifically for reporting to institutional donors e.g. Irish Aid. Aidlink does not envisage developing separate types of results frameworks for each institutional donor. Rather, **the single organisational RF is adapted or modified to meet the reporting requirements of each institutional donor, as necessary.**

¹⁹ Agreed at the outset of the project

7.1.1 Field Monitoring Visits²⁰

Field monitoring visits to each partner are conducted by Aidlink staff on a **six-monthly basis**. These visits include monitoring of both project and capacity-building initiatives. During these visits, the project results framework is utilised to assess progress against each of the activity areas in the project. In addition to monitoring of outputs and outcomes, discussions with partners and reports from monitoring visits include specific reference to the accountability and learning issues referred to in Section 3 above. Six-monthly monitoring visits will usually be conducted by a Programme Officer and or the CEO. (See Annex 1 for COVID-19 impact)

7.1.2 Final Evaluations

Aidlink commissions a final evaluation of each partner project at the end of the three-year cycle. In order to ensure full objectivity, **final evaluations are always external in nature** i.e. they are undertaken by an external consultant or agency to a specific Terms of Reference as agreed between Aidlink, the partner and the consultant. Evaluations are conducted with specific reference to the DAC criteria (Section 4.1) and the Istanbul Principles for CSO Aid Effectiveness (Section 4.2) The Rainbow Framework Planning Tool (Section 4.3) is used as a guide in designing and managing the evaluation process and methodology.

Ideally, evaluations are conducted on an *ex-post* basis i.e. after the completion of the full four year implementation period. In practice, interim funding is often not available to allow for the *ex-post* evaluation to take place before a new cycle begins, in which case it may be necessary to conduct an *ex-ante* evaluation, just before the programme cycle is completed, so that the new cycle can be designed and implemented without delay.

Evaluations will address both accountability and learning issues (as detailed in Section 3) with each evaluation recommendation being formally considered by partners and Aidlink under a formal written 'management response' process. The rationale for adoption or non-adoption of each recommendation under the management response is recorded for future reference by Aidlink and its donors. Key lessons are also formally recorded and are referred to in the design of the next programme cycle.

7.1.3 Mid-Term Evaluations (MTE)

Interim evaluations generally take place around the mid-point of the three-year cycle. An MTE may be conducted internally by Aidlink and/or partner staff (potentially using staff from another Aidlink partner) or by an external consultant. Recommendations from an MTE are considered in a similar manner to those from a final evaluation, with a written management response, including a clear rationale for the adoption or rejection of recommendations. Lessons learned from an MTE are also formally documented and considered in how to change/adapt the programme as it progresses.

7.2 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Partner Capacity-Building Programme

Partner Capacity-Building (CB) is a key aspect of Aidlink's overall approach to development work. The *Organisational Approach to Partner Capacity-Building* (2014) describes Aidlink's 'triple approach' to partner CB in detail. The process for monitoring the implementation of partner capacity-building plans is detailed in Section 3.8 of that document, and the process for evaluating CB plans is outlined in Section 3.10, so they will not be outlined in detail here. In summary, partner CB is normally based on a two-year cycle with six-monthly written updates from each partner to Aidlink; six-monthly CB (and programming) field visits by Aidlink staff; and 12-monthly in-field review of CB plans. As for programme work, specific targets are set for CB outputs and outcomes.

- During evaluation of CB work, the measurement of **outputs** relates to additional **capacity** that has been provided or built in various ways;
- Measurement of progress on **outcomes** relates to improvements in **organisational performance** that (should) arise from the additional capacity.
- The **impact** of the CB process is measured in terms of how increased capacity and performance enables the partner organisation to **deliver on its strategic plan** to a higher level than before.

Hence, there is a clear parallel between the measurement of progress on CB work and the measurement of programme progress, and the former is also captured in a results framework format.

7.3 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Student Immersion Programme

²⁰ Please see Annex 2 for approach in the context of COVID-19

The Student Immersion Programme (SIP) is currently operational with four partner schools. Due to the nature of this project, the M&E element is created with each group. A set of bilateral learning objectives will be agreed between the school and Aidlink at the start of each programme. Aidlink use an adaptation of the World Wise Global Schools self-assessment tool²¹ to measure these objectives.

7.4 Linking with Audit and Financial Management Review Processes

All programme monitoring and evaluation process include basic reviews of expenditure against budgets, with particular emphasis on the rationale for variances in expenditure. The assessment of cost-effectiveness of interventions is a key aspect of the evaluation process, as described under the DAC 'efficiency' criterion (Section 4.1). Partner financial management capacity is addressed as one of the seven institutional capacities under the Partner Capacity Building Approach.²² **Audit and financial management reports are utilised in conjunction with programme monitoring and evaluation reports to make judgements in relation to the performance of Aidlink itself, and of its partners**, from both learning and accountability perspectives. A Value for Money (VFM)²³ framework, which required by some donors (*in particular Irish Aid*), has been developed for CSO's as another means of a financial review for a partner and/or project. Aidlink has a VFM statement as part of the Irish Aid CSF grant application, this will be updated to represent the overall development programme.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation at Organisational Level (Level 3)

Building on the monitoring and evaluation work that takes place at partner and programme levels, Aidlink also conducts a number of M&E exercises at organisational level to obtain a macro-level overview of programming progress both on an annual and long-term basis.

Compliance with the Charities Regulator Governance Code captures evidence on Aidlink's accountability and transparency, and good governance²⁴.

In addition the Board review annually :

- Partner capacity and programming work
- Programme – results and impact (including the Student Immersion Programme)
- Long-term studies of all programmes over a ten-year period²⁵.

8.1 Annual Field Review of Partner CB and Programme Work

An annual workshop with Aidlink Key partners takes place at field level, where possible. This meeting would follow the individual meetings and project visits with partners. Provision is made for some Aidlink board members (in addition to the Director and POs) to participate in these meetings on occasion (and subject to budgetary constraints) in order to improve their overall understanding of Aidlink's field programming, thus enabling the board to improve its oversight function as the governing body of the organisation. The workshops will focus on four key areas: programmes, partner CB, RBM and the rights based approach.

8.2 Annual Internal Review of Programming Work

The annual partner field workshop is followed by an **annual internal review at head office level by the Aidlink board, director and staff**. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider **progress in relation to all aspects of relationships with partners, both organisational and programmatic**. The review includes the following activities:

- Consideration of how issues arising during the previous year's annual review have been addressed in the interim period;
- A discussion of key issues arising from the annual field workshop with partners, both in relation to programming work and partner capacity-building;

²¹ WWGS self-assessment tool can be found here: <https://www.worldwiseschools.ie/self-assessment-tools/>

²² See Section 3.2 of the Aidlink Organisational Approach to Partner Capacity-Building.

²³ See: <https://www.bond.org.uk/hubs/value-for-money>

²⁴ <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-charities/charities-governance-code>

²⁵ 10 year review (2017)

- A systematic review of recommendations from programme evaluations undertaken during the year, and the management responses to these recommendations, from both accountability and learning perspectives;
- A discussion of issues emerging from reviews or formal evaluations (where available) of the Student Immersion Programme (as described in Section 7.3) that have taken place during the year.

The annual programme review process is an important source of information and discussion for the Aidlink board, in enabling it to address key aspects of its oversight function in relation to organisational governance and strategy. The programmes sub-committee are responsible for the coordination and management of this review.

8.3 Long-term (longitudinal) Programme Reviews

In recognition of the long-term nature of the development process, Aidlink is also committed to conducting 10-year reviews of all of its work so that it can make longer-term assessments of its overall effectiveness and impact. Ten-year reviews will be conducted across the entire range of programming, including the Student Immersion Programme, the Partner Capacity-Building Programme and the field development programmes. As for annual reviews, the long-term reviews will be used to inform organisational strategic planning and review processes.

9. Oversight and Resourcing of Monitoring and Evaluation Work

9.1 Responsibility for M&E

All partner organisations have responsibility for ongoing monitoring and reporting on their own projects and programmes (Level 1 M&E) in line with approved proposals to Aidlink and or other donors. They are also responsible for facilitating and managing the local aspects of evaluation processes in line with the requirements of Aidlink and donors, and for ensuring the full participation of beneficiaries in M&E exercises.

The relevant Aidlink Programme Officer (PO) is responsible for overseeing field monitoring activities and the commissioning and management of evaluations (Level 2 M&E), in consultation with the Director, and the development of reports for donors. An Aidlink PO will take responsibility for organising the annual field-level review workshop with partners, in consultation with the Director.

The Aidlink Director has overall responsibility for ensuring that all monitoring and evaluation initiatives are delivered in line with this policy. The Director is specifically responsible for organising the annual internal review process conducted by the board (under Level 3 M&E), in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Board, who will chair the review workshop.

9.2 Staffing Capacity

Aidlink are committed to strengthen staff knowledge of M&E systems and best practices. The Programme Officer will keep informed of new methodologies and best practice activities and responsible for in-house training on M&E and Aidlink's approach to M&E.

9.3 Budgeting for M&E

Given the critical importance of M&E activities to overall programme quality, Aidlink will ensure that **adequate provision is made in all programme budgets for monitoring and evaluation activities**, including the cost of monitoring visits by Aidlink staff, and specific budgets for mid-term and final evaluations. A sum in the range of 7% to 10% of the overall budget will be included for this purpose. The percentage of the programme budget to be allocated may vary by project as, for example, an advocacy based project might have a much smaller budget than a service related project (as the latter may often include the provision of goods, equipment or infrastructure) but might well require a similar level of resourcing for M&E activities.

10. Updating and Review of the Monitoring and Evaluation Policy

This Monitoring and Evaluation Policy is operational from November 2020 and will be updated on an ongoing basis as required to incorporate new developments or changes in other policies, strategies or processes within the organisation. A full review of the policy will take place after three years, in November 2023.

Annex 1 Covid-19 Update to Aidlink's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on all development and humanitarian projects across the sector. Aidlink's Development Programmes are being adjusted to account for the challenges created by COVID-19 responding to both the threat of the virus and the imposed lockdowns, while at the same time committed to meeting to core objectives.

The global and national responses to the pandemic have had significant implications for Aidlink's M&E system. With this, and in addition to changes and adaptations made to programmes M&E Policy systems and procedures are also being adjusted.

Aidlink has adopted the principals of 'Do No Harm'²⁶ and is committed to insuring programme participants, staff, partners and consultants are not exposed to increased risk by focusing on what we need to know, (understanding that is not always what we would like to know). With these guiding principles Aidlink commits to;

- Maintain standards, focusing on essential data;
- Identifying alternative sources of information and secondary data (Government/NGOs/Research/Media/Key Informants) and appropriate triangulation tools;
- Alternative data collection methods – including mobile phones interviews with key stakeholders and beneficiaries where possible.

Aidlink, working closely with strategic partners, will agree adapted local M&E plans and promote greater collaboration, coordination and coherence with other agencies to share information and avoid duplication where possible.

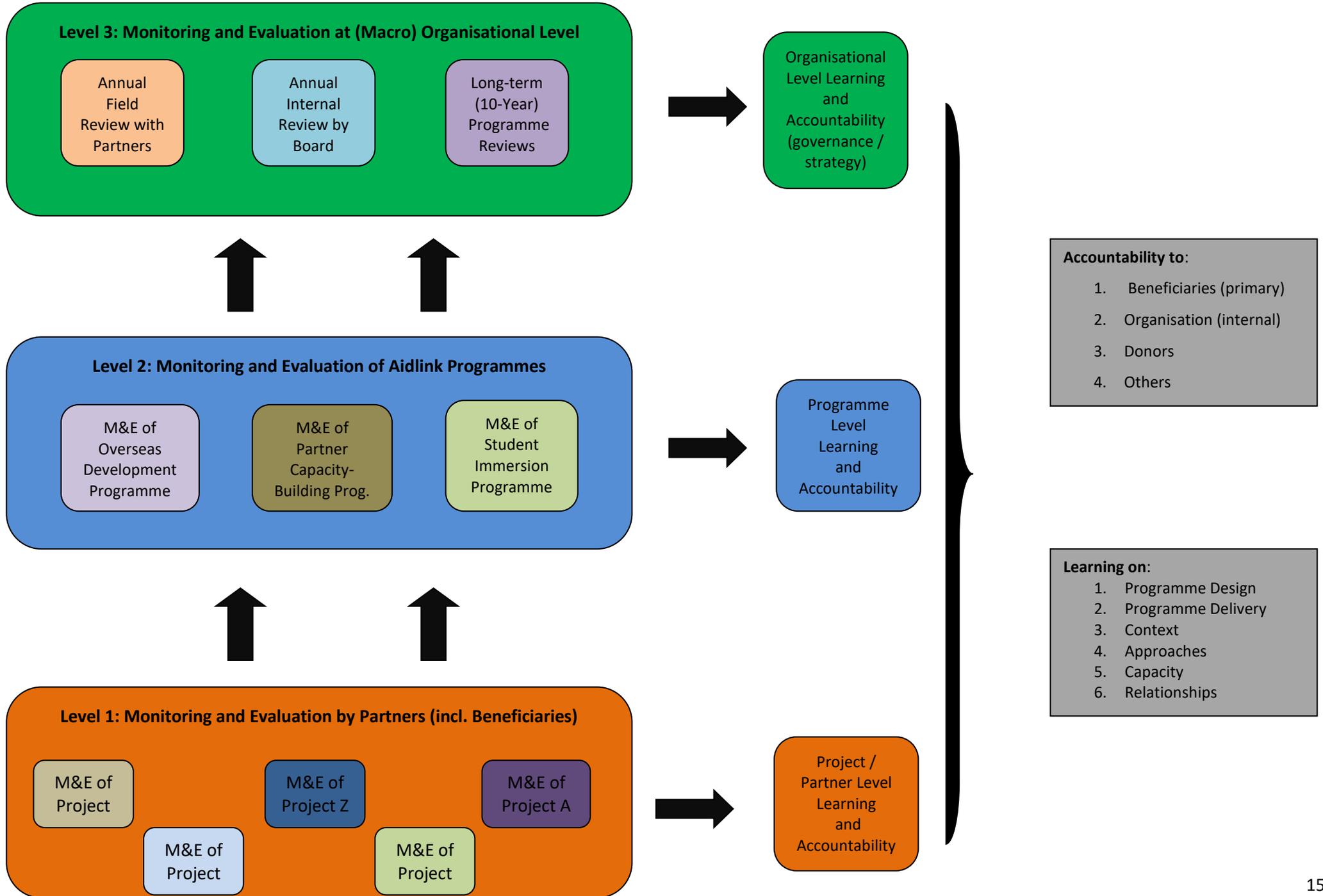
In summary, Aidlink will:

- Focus on critical activities / indicators and temporarily pause less critical M&E activities.
- Move to remote monitoring where possible over email, phone, WhatsApp Skype etc. – consider short field trips via WhatsApp.
- Engage in frequent (fortnightly) calls with partner staff to obtain updates (both context/situation and project updates).
- Consider who has access to communities – (only field staff in the immediate – will remain under review).
- Include gender considerations e.g. males have more access to phones. Noting that for sensitive information, phone interviews may not be ideal.
- Ensure your adaption does not further marginalise groups e.g. women, those with low levels of literacy.
- For locations without direct or limited access to technology-based options indirect communications options will be considered e.g. trusted focal points in communities such as Community Facilitators, teachers etc. (recognising limitations).

In adapting this policy to Covid-19 restrictions Aidlink has analysed the policy across the three levels of monitoring, assessed the risk involved at each level and adapted the framework accordingly (see Annex 3).

²⁶ https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/donoharm_pe07_synthesis.pdf

Annex 2: Figure 1 - Aidlink's Three-Level Monitoring & Evaluation System



Annex 3: Covid-19 Update to Aidlink’s Three-Level Monitoring and Evaluation System (November 2020)

Level 1: Monitoring and Evaluation by Partners	Risk	Adaption
<i>Monitoring by Partners: Partner organisations are expected to visit each project area on a quarterly basis at a minimum and to provide monitoring reports (to a standard format) to Aidlink on a quarterly basis.</i>	<p>Partner staff unable to travel to field locations as a result of domestic travel restrictions.</p> <p>Partners therefore unable to visit project areas on a quarterly basis throughout 2020 which poses a risk to programme quality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partners to use trusted focal points in target communities to gather information (Community Facilitators) - Partners to use remote monitoring (mobile phones) to gather information from the field – keeping in mind the principles of Do No Harm.
Level 2: Monitoring and Evaluation of Aidlink’s Programme	Risk	Adaption
<i>Field Monitoring Visits: Field monitoring visits to each partner are conducted by Aidlink staff on a six-monthly basis. These visits include monitoring of both project and capacity-building initiatives.</i>	<p>Aidlink staff unable to travel to programme countries as a result of international Covid-19 travel restrictions. (Aidlink CEO travelled to Kenya in February 2020)</p> <p>This will mean that only one field visit will be conducted over the course of 2020 which poses a risk to programme quality and governance of KIQEP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aidlink and partners to conduct fortnightly meetings over Skype on project progress and context updates. Meeting minutes to be saved and filed. - Potential for Aidlink to conduct remote interviews with beneficiaries – using templates from monitoring visits as format for questionnaires.²⁷
<i>Mid-Term Evaluations: Interim evaluations generally take place around the mid-point of the four-year cycle.</i>	<p>Aidlink staff are unable to travel for a mid-term evaluation in 2020 as a result of Covid-19 travel restrictions.</p> <p>This poses a risk to programme quality, strategic planning and Aidlink’s governance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential for Aidlink to conduct phone interviews across three levels: partner management, partner field staff and programme beneficiaries in order to confirm and triangulate information received from partners – keeping in mind the principles of Do No Harm.²⁸
Level 3: Monitoring and Evaluation at (Macro) Organisational Level	Risk	Adaption
<p><i>An annual workshop with the five Aidlink partners takes place at field level each year following the individual meetings and project visits with partners.</i></p> <p><i>The annual partner field workshop is followed by an annual internal review at head office level by the Aidlink board, director and staff.</i></p>	<p>Aidlink staff and partners are unable to travel and meet at field level in 2020. This poses a risk to programme quality, partner capacity building and strategic planning.</p> <p>Aidlink board, director and staff may not be able to meet face-to-face in 2020 as a result of restrictions. This poses a threat to governance and strategic planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aidlink to use remote technology where possible and conduct partner meetings over Zoom in 2020. A date for an in-field partner meeting will then be set for 2021. - If necessary Aidlink will use remote technology to conduct annual internal reviews with board, director and staff. The need for this to be done remotely will be reassessed in late 2020 as Covid-19 restrictions change.

²⁷ The actioning of this depends on in-country situation. Lockdowns may affect the ability of partner staff to contact beneficiaries

²⁸ The actioning of this depends on in-country situation. Lockdowns may affect the ability of partner staff to contact beneficiaries